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CLASS, IDEOLOGY AND COMMERCIAL TELEVISION: AN ANALYSIS OF *The A-Team*[1]

GINA MARCHETTI

In *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act,* Frederic Jameson points to the socio-political kernel at the heart of Levi-Strauss' structural analysis of mythic forms. Jameson insists that "the individual narrative, or the individual formal structure, is to be grasped as the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction" or, in other words, narrative can be looked at as "a symbolic enactment of the social within the formal and the aesthetic."(77)

By looking at the ideological forces which intersect a text, the genuine complexity of even the most apparently transparent of narratives can begin to be understood. When studying commercial television, for example, the analyst often stops at the superficial simplicity of the plot. Good guys foil bad guys in apparently interminably repeatable patterns.

Inspired by the work of Italian political and cultural theorist Antonio Gramsci, television critics like Douglas Kellner and Todd Gitlin have begun to look at television texts in a different way. In addition, a great deal of the work on television done by those involved with the Birmingham School of cultural studies has also pointed in a similar direction. As this research has shown, underneath schematic tales of good triumphing over evil, there lies an actual text, in a very specific historical situation, which is marked by the complexity of the social and political contradictions of the moment. Profound ideological struggle actually marks what at first appears to be a very simple narrative. Eventually, the dominant ideology manages to affirm itself as the "truth," as embodied by the "good guy" in the popular narrative, but the fact that this fantasy is designed to be sold to those outside the ruling classes, far removed from positions of social and economic power, can never be forgotten or ignored by the mechanism of the text. Ambivalences and contradictions are structured into the aesthetic form of these fantasies. A close analysis brings out ideological complexities and exposes the way in which a hegemonic ideology can draw in those outside of the status-quo and use fantasy for its own ends.

The A-Team, which began in the 1982-83 season, marked a turning point for the NBC network. Although, at present, *The A-Team* seems to be slipping somewhat in popularity, the show has remained one of NBC's few consistently highly rated series for several seasons. Certainly part of the show's appeal comes from the astute way it negotiates racial, sexual and economic contradictions for its audience. *The A-Team* presents a world of open contradiction in which angry blacks like Mr. T "do as they are told," hunted Vietnam vets continue to "obey orders" from their superiors, and adventurous females remain on the periphery of the action serving refreshments to a group of very violent mercenaries. Resistance to the status-quo

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finds expression, while it is also squelched, and the viewer may enjoy this expression of anger along with its containment.

Each week, the A-team, a Vietnam-era commando unit on the lam from the army for supposedly robbing the Bank of Hanoi, regroups in order to help a needy individual or group. John "Hannibal" Smith (George Peppard) is their commander; Templeton "Face" Peck (Dirk Benedict) plays the con-man; "Howling Mad" Murdock (Dwight Schultz) is the unit's pilot and a mental patient; B.A. "Bad Attitude" Baracas (Mr. T) provides the team's muscle and keeps the automobiles in working order. Originally, the team also featured a female journalist, Amy Allen (Melinda Culea), who joined the team in the U.S. However, after being replaced by another female journalist character in the second season, the token female member of the team has since been dropped completely.[2]

In each episode, the A-team helps an underdog vanquish a more powerful bully. Usually, the underdog helped by the team represents an oppressed group, e.g., Hispanic or Asian immigrants, migrant farm workers, disabled veterans, Native Americans, blacks. The enemy is a larger, institutionalized force—often, a business competitor, organized crime, corrupt government officials, a large corporation or government agency.

Identified in certain ways with both the underdog and the enemy, the A-team mediates between the two spheres and works in the interests of the oppressed. Like the victims on the show, the team is marginal to society, racially mixed, and on the run from the government. However, the team also resembles the underdog's antagonists in that it is well-organized, hierarchical, able to manipulate power and wealth, efficient and violent. Using trickery, machine guns and lots of helicopter and airplane assaults, the team manages to decide all disputes in favor of the "little guy" by taking on the methods and part of the identity of the oppressor.

Class and Capitalism: Place in the Hierarchy

Several episodes of *The A-Team* revolve around property relations, business deals (both crooked and honest), kidnappings for ransom, and all sorts of exchanges of money, real estate, automobiles and other goods. This fascination with private property, however, is not unambiguous. On the one hand, goods are prized, envied, accumulated and enjoyed; while, on the other hand, characters in the show take a clear delight in destroying property, often by blowing expensive commodities like cars completely out of existence.

For example, B.A. prizes his van above all else. However, although his love of his van and his possessiveness of it are understandable (even if comically so), each episode offers the viewer the enjoyment of watching several other very expensive vehicles be trashed in spectacular car collisions and airplane wrecks. Property is both valued and trashed, and, in a sense, valued because it can be trashed.

At first, this contradictory presentation of goods seems peculiar. However, actually, this ambivalent representation of property comes as no surprise when placed within a broader context. For most people living in advanced capitalist societies, money and property relations are of vital concern. Outside the ruling classes, most television viewers have an intense interest in, though lack of real control over, property, production and the bourgeois marketplace. *The A-Team's* ambivalent presentation of property parallels the viewer's own feelings of envy, desire and frustration. Destruction of unobtainable luxuries can be as powerful a wish as the dream of accumulation and display of wealth.

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B.A.'s rampant destruction of property, therefore, becomes as understandable and enjoyable as his possessiveness.

Designed to appeal to "as many people as possible" (read: a working-class audience), *The A-Team* carefully negotiates the tensions, frustrations and dreams of its viewers within the norms set by the dominant ideology. Class conflicts do find a voice—if a muffled one. In fact, the team itself forms a microcosm of class relationships and conflicts. Authority, hierarchical order, military rank and its obligations, class privileges and responsibilities provide the show with weekly dramatic situations and comic subplots. A rather strictly maintained military hierarchy reinforces the class differences found within the group. Colonel John "Hannibal" Smith, as his nickname implies, is the gutsy, unorthodox leader of the team. White and male (facts highlighted by his ever-present phallic cigar and close-cropped light blonde hair), Hannibal draws on authority which stems from paternalistic good will.

Templeton "Face" Peck, clearly second in command (although he is technically outranked by Murdock), gives the unit its front, its "face," partly as a con-man, partly as a public relations expert. Like Hannibal, he is white, privileged, a schemer and a master of disguise. As an outside cover, Hannibal performs bit parts in Hollywood B-pictures. Similarly, by taking on various personae, Face earns his keep—and, indeed, keeps himself quite well in expensive suits and sportscars—as a con.

Looking at *The A-Team* as a fantasy for workers, children and the disenfranchised, the fact that power manifests itself as an outgrowth of the malleability of one's personality, as deception, as disguise, as a confidence racket, takes on a particular significance. Face and Hannibal have the ability to change their identity at will and to convince others of their authenticity. For working-class and minority viewers, this fantasy may be particularly appealing since social mobility appears to be as simple as mastering an accent, understanding what wine goes with what fish, or changing a costume. However, a fundamental ambivalence forms the center of this fantasy, since power is based on deception, uncertain identity and inscrutability. Hannibal and Face seem desirable, but remote, and not completely straightforward characters.

Although Hannibal and Face will occasionally hammer a nail or adjust a screw, most of the manual tasks are performed by the team's two working-class representatives—Murdock and B.A. Both are "teamsters"—Murdock takes charge of flying vehicles (and, as a pilot, is superior in rank to B.A.); B.A. handles the automobiles. Although Murdock occasionally works on airplane/helicopter maintenance, B.A. performs most tasks involving engine repair, carpentry, electronics, and other types of manual labor. Physical rather than verbal, B.A. spends most of his on-screen time punching out the bad guys or soldering steel. Of course, Murdock and B.A. are not by any stretch of the imagination ordinary workers. As part of an elite team, they are placed above ordinary 9-to-5 employment by a sense of adventure, glamor, belonging and mission. Recognizable to the workers in the audience as similar to themselves, Murdock and B.A. are also heroes, and therefore somehow more significant.

Although both B.A. and Murdock are followers within the team hierarchy, no sense of fellowship exists between them. Ostensibly, B.A. dislikes Murdock's playful, mainly feigned, insanity, his verbal dexterity and his ability to get the better of the "sane" B.A. through his wit. However, Murdock's subtle Southern lilt and B.A.'s tough, no-nonsense, ghetto mentality point to a barely hinted at racial root to

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their supposedly comic and innocent inability to get along. This relationship points to something the dominant class would like to perpetuate—divisions within the ranks of the ruled. Underneath a professional harmony, blacks and whites remain at each other's throats. Without Hannibal's ability as leader to intercede and control B.A's anger, the team would be unable to function. Thus, the fantasy world of *The A-Team* perpetuates the myth that without white, male, bourgeois authority, no work could ever be done.

As further evidence of this conservative thrust, *The A-Team* openly ridicules liberation and solidarity movements. In several episodes, Murdock comically takes up the "cause" of an oppressed group (e.g., pet plants, bugs, golf balls or other inanimate objects) or the persona of a champion of the oppressed (e.g., the "masked avenger"). Although presented as a nonsensical part of Murdock's supposedly war-induced insanity, these causes serve a number of functions within the narrative that go beyond simple comic relief. First, Murdock's "liberation movements" parody the team's own "mission." This places the A-team's crusades within a context of fun and fantasy: in no way could their championing of the causes of new immigrants, illegal aliens, Native Americans, the elderly or handicapped lead to any connection with a world beyond fantasy television. This comic self-reflexivity, therefore, keeps any subversive implication of the team's desire to right the wrongs done to the oppressed strictly in check.

Second, Murdock's causes concretize another of the latent ideological underpinnings of the show: that self-help is not possible. If the team did not exist, these victims of government and capitalism-out-of-control would simply be plowed under by the system. If self-liberation and solidarity movements worked, the team would have no reason to exist. Moreover, through these running jokes, *The A-Team* recognizes something topical which may be of interest to the show's viewers. However, because these movements are outside the bourgeoisie's standard idea of social movement and change (which is always individual and never collective), these fantasies and possibilities must remain absurd, pictured as insane jokes.

These "liberation movements" do contain, however, albeit in a disguised form, a kernel of class hostility. Murdock's complaints seem legitimate, even if they are made on behalf of inanimate objects rather than the poor, blacks or Hispanics. He demands self-determination, freedom from harassment, respect and status for the socially marginal. In this case, jokes hide unacceptable anger while also expressing that anger.

B.A.'s "Bad Attitude" functions in a similar way. B.A. tells off all sorts of people who stand in his way. He displays purposely bad manners, snarls at wealthy white people, shoots at wealthy gangsters, and destroys private property by the ton. In other words, B.A. plays out his hostility physically.

Once again, however, this contempt for wealth and the wealthy is contained by the same gesture that expresses it. Although B.A. can have a "bad attitude" toward the outside world, he remains subject to white authority within the team. Murdock must never be allowed to get together with, plot with, or rule with B.A. Hannibal—white, male, a voice of military authority—rules the roost. As a consequence, *The A-Team* dramatizes all those values and relationships necessary for the smooth functioning of advanced capitalist society—clear hierarchical order, white male domination, a vertical structure of cooperation, but no solidarity among the workers at the bottom. The show sells a fantasy vision of work relations to the workers in the audience, but this fantasy also describes actual

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relations and implicitly perpetuates them.

Race, Mr. T and the Child-Viewer

Although he receives comparatively little screen time and although his dialogue is minimal, Mr. T, who portrays B.A., provides *The A-Team* with its most distinctive feature. Certainly a great deal of Mr. T's special appeal comes from his ability to embody and fantastically resolve ideological contradictions for the viewers.[3] His appeal to black viewers provides a case in point. If blacks in the U.S. must acquiesce to whites, do "as they are told" by white bosses, Mr. T, as B.A., gets to tell "his betters" off with impunity. White villains and their goons never stand in his way. He verbally and physically assaults all sorts of authority figures, and his anger is presented as morally right.

If American blacks are forced to blend in with white society in order to be upwardly mobile, if they must be "invisible" as blacks to be accepted by the white world, Mr. T can be flamboyantly different. Wearing what he claims is an African warrior's hairstyle, pounds of gold jewelry, feathered earrings and army fatigues, Mr. T cuts an extraordinary figure. He uses symbols of oppression—i.e., the chains of African slaves, Native American feathers, the foot soldier's uniform—as signs of strength, power and golden wealth. Muscular and large, Mr. T's physical presence promises protection for friends and a physical threat to adversaries.

However, if Mr. T's on- and off-screen persona allow for the expression of black anger, cultural vision and power, this threat to white authority is kept carefully in check. The fictional character B.A. can express his anger and strength, but only in very limited ways. For example, his ongoing verbal battles with Murdock constantly test this limit. Hannibal always interrupts their quarrels while Murdock has the upper hand, before the two can come to blows. Although B.A. may tell off or beat up anyone he chooses outside the group, within the group, Hannibal's word is law, and B.A. never criticizes this authority, accepting his leadership humbly and unquestioningly.

The fact that this representative of black strength accepts white authority fortifies the dominant ideology's position as voice of moral righteousness. Like Tonto's love for the Lone Ranger, B.A.'s loyalty implicitly justifies Hannibal's position as a smarter, more powerful, more dynamic superior. If B.A. can accept Hannibal, then Hannibal and the white leadership he represents must truly represent the interests of everyone, including blacks and the working classes. B.A. accepts his place as necessary to the functioning of the group, but as quite definitely outside of power and decision-making. In this capacity, B.A. enters the ranks of all sorts of popular American helper-characters who have justified the perpetuation of white domination through their positions as Native American guides, Chinese butlers, or faithful black servants.

In fact, B.A. conforms to several unsavory racial stereotypes. Although, for example, the fact that B.A is a "bad ass" has some very positive aspects (e.g., physical strength, frankness, courage, distrust of hypocrisy and dishonesty), this image also has an underside of rudeness, crudity, stupidity, animalism and ignorance. In addition, B.A is child-like, not completely socialized, and a little bit like a pet animal. For example, B.A. has irrational, childish fears. He must be tricked into flying on airplanes because he is deathly afraid of flight. He cannot joke or deal with humor because he is verbally, and, it is intimated, intellectually limited. Thus, Murdock's wit upsets B.A., although all the other members of the team can humor their crazy colleague. Also, B.A. is often associated with the physical side of things. He

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constantly fights, eats, spits, and gets dirty working with his hands.

However, the way in which B.A. (and, in many ways, Mr. T himself) conforms to this stereotype is riddled with contradictions. Although B.A. may be a bit simple-minded, he is also presented as a mechanical genius. He may be a worker and a glorified chauffeur, but he also manages to transform these ordinary occupations into extraordinary accomplishments. The star Mr. T often reminds interviewers of his youth spent in the Chicago housing projects and of his sundry jobs as bodyguard and bouncer; likewise, B.A.'s roots are humble, his tasks simple, but he is the salt of the earth and the crucial brawn of the team. A point of identification for those viewers who work with their hands for more mundane ends, he is a mechanic in designer overalls and gold jewelry, a walking emblem of the American Rags-to-Riches Dream. Viewers see their own ordinariness transformed in the person of B.A./Mr. T—respected member of an elite and professional group, Hollywood star and millionaire.

Aside from his appeal to the adult audience, Mr. T/B.A. has a very special significance for children. For young viewers, B.A. embodies both the threat and power of the adult—in an exaggeratedly adult, developed body—and the naivete, innocence and warmth of a child. As a cover, B.A. works in a day-care center with underprivileged children. In addition, he often helps children in the show's weekly episodes, e.g., a Mexican immigrant girl in search of her mother, the little brother of a prison inmate. As a star, Mr. T plays Santa Claus at the White House, visits Chicago's housing projects and lectures children on drug abuse.

In many respects, B.A./Mr. T is like a black Incredible Hulk. If children feel physically threatened and powerless because of their size, B.A./Mr. T offers a fantasy of physical power and control, a kid's point-of-view in an adult body. Moreover, his physical power always remains at the service of children and the powerless. He looks mean, but he is actually a pussycat underneath. However, this softness and appealing innocence also makes the character extremely cooptable. He remains a child held in check by a white father-figure. Anger, resentment, and the desire to break away from white authority are recognized but contained by the perpetuation of stereotypes of racial minorities as fearful, childlike, passive, ineffectual, and dependent on the paternal hand of a white leader for guidance and balance.

Vietnam, the Crisis of State Power and the Mediating Function of *The A-Team*

In *The Empire's Old Clothes,* Ariel Dorfman suggests that the Depression of the 1930s had a fundamental impact on the ways in which American popular culture portrayed its heroes. New Deal super-heroes, like Superman and the Lone Ranger, represented state power (which increased dramatically in the 1930s) in a human form. Thus, the hero symbolized the ideal state's function of protecting the little guy against the excesses of capitalism, while maintaining the political and economic power structure as it was.

A similar argument can be made for our present post-Vietnam, post-Watergate era. The Vietnam war brought a suspicion of the power of the military, of the government, and of the business interests the state represents into the consciousness of the American public. Watergate and its aftermath aggravated this situation. Even Reagan and a political swing to the Right have not eradicated suspicion and distrust. This uneasy political climate, however, has not bred radical change. Rather, the power structure recoups these suspicions of mismanagement and corruption

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by recognizing faults, then treating them as exceptions rather than characteristics of a fundamental injustice.

In many ways, the A-team functions like the Lone Ranger as an idealized embodiment of state power. The A-team steps in to right an injustice for the little guy when the police, labor unions, the church, the welfare bureau, the FBI, immigration, or other social or governmental institutions fail to do their job adequately. The A-team's very existence as a group tacitly affirms the fact that the audience is correct in assuming that the government cannot or is not doing its job. An heroic team must usurp its functions to ensure the smooth running of society by rooting out corruption within the system.

The fact that the team consists of Vietnam veterans on the lam from the Army puts it in a unique position to mediate between the state and the general populus. On the one hand, the team takes the place of the corrupt state. They are, in fact, criminals trying to escape from the injustice of that state, which falsely convicted them of a crime they did not commit. (Incidentally, that crime was robbing the Bank of Hanoi, which seems odd, since they were convicted of doing damage to an "enemy" nation, North Vietnam.) Thus, as a group of wanted criminals, the A-team cannot be directly associated with state power and are thus free to take over that power without any contaminating influence. On the other hand, the organization of the team itself testifies to the necessity of the state and the military. Military rank and obedience to a superior's orders never come into question. Disciplined and well-trained, the team uses the skills it learned fighting in Vietnam to champion the rights of the underdog in the U.S.

Interestingly, *The A-Team* seldom deals in any direct way with the Vietnam war or its aftermath. However, the show does revolve around the tacit assumption that the war was justified and necessary. The implication is that good people, like the members of the A-team, were manipulated by an impersonal and insensitive government, which lost the war through inefficiency and corruption.

One of the very few episodes to deal with Vietnam in any substantial way, "Recipe for Heavy Bread," aired in the 1983-84 season, actually has more to do with American capitalism than with Asian communism. In this episode, the A-team comes to the rescue of Lin Duc Coo (played by Japanese-American actor Mako), a Vietnamese baker who had helped the team survive a stay in prison camp during the war. Acting as a liaison between General Chow (John Fuioka), the former prison commandant, and his American drug connection, Tom Anderson (Marjoe Gortner), Lin decides to go underground while in the United States.

In many ways, "Recipe for Heavy Bread" can be looked at as a metaphorical replay of the war in Vietnam. A basically "nice" (because he is sympathetic to Americans and cooperates with them) Vietnamese, Lin, is being manipulated by a cruel and maniacal Vietnamese communist military force, represented by General Chow, The American military steps in—in the guise of the A-team—to help the underdog. However, this time, America wins and a grateful Lin starts on the road to U.S. citizenship at the end of the episode. Symbolically, this narrative revivifies America's justification for its military role in Vietnam. The "good" South Vietnamese wanted to have an American-style democracy, i.e., a military dictatorship which would insure the safe operation of American corporate interests and continued dependence on imported American goods. The "bad" Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, however, had the wicked road to communism in mind.

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However, this mythic reworking of the war has little to do with the relative merits of two different systems of government. At one point, Lin states, "I am not political." Certainly, this denial of politics helps to justify Lin's treason, while feeding into the myth that America is beyond politics and simply the best of all possible worlds, an unchanging paradise. However, this denial points to a more fundamental ambivalence within the test. The struggle between Lin and Chow has nothing to do with political philosophy in the classic sense and everything to do with class antagonism.

General Chow is villainous not because he reads Marx and wants to collectivize farms, but because he runs drugs and actually represents the dark side of American capitalism. Chow wants to eliminate Lin because he is a disloyal employee, a threat to the smooth operation of his drug business, not because he is a deserter. Political allegiances have little to do with Chow's actions. After all, he himself collaborates with American and Chinese "enemies" to keep his business operation running This flip-flop of political and economic relationships comes as no surprise when the fact that living in a socialist society would be difficult for most American viewers to imagine—in either a positive or negative way. The iniquities of American business practices, on the other hand, are a fact of everyday life and perfectly understandable to anyone working within a capitalist economy. Therefore, Chow's villainy takes on a peculiarly American flavor, and Lin plays the victimized worker to Chow's demanding boss. The A-team intervenes to keep the excesses of capitalism in check, to act as labor mediator, government regulator, and immigration officer rolled into one.

At a time when Reagan's rhetoric on America's Manifest Destiny conjures up images of the Vietnam war, *The A-Team* draws on it as an attention grabber, a premise that promises a lot of action. The disgruntled Vietnam veteran has gone from being a figure of uncontrolled anger, a walking time-bomb like Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver,* to being the new American hero, able to embody both the power of the state and a suspicion of that power. Trained in guerilla warfare, unable to win the war abroad, the vet comes home to the popular imagination, to chauvinistically reaffirm American might and right, while simultaneously expressing anger and hostility toward the government that created the war. *The A-Team* domesticates the vet for home consumption; the unit may be dangerous, but it is ultimately loveable. The show brings the Vietnam vet out of the asylum and the unemployment line and into the living room, with him come fantasies of justified violence, American chauvinism, racism, rebellion and ambivalence.

The A-Team in Context: The Paradoxical Nature of the Television Institution

Since network profits come from the sale of the television audience to the advertisers, television producers must create fantasies which will draw in that audience by hook or by crook. However, these fantasies are manufactured by a group of people rather removed from their ethnic, working-class, black, minority, youthful and/or female audience. The producers—predominantly white and male—see themselves as the norm, but they also must imagine a drama that will appeal to those outside that "norm." Moreover, they must produce a text which will somehow draw in as many segments of a very heterogeneous public as possible. Hence, the contradictory nature of television fantasies becomes clearer.

The A-Team, like most prime-time commercial television shows, appeals to a

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family audience. In *Visible Fictions,* John Ellis points out that there is a gap between actual families and assumed families within the television institution. According to Ellis, television perpetuates an image of domesticity which does not really fit contemporary familial structures. Instead, television assumes the nuclear family as both an ideal and a norm. Although a fiction which has little to do with actual domestic patterns, this image of domestic bliss and stability functions well in the marketplace. It keeps an image of the home as both a haven from the workplace and a center of consumption intact.

In the case of *The A-Team,* each member of the idealized household is given a little corner of the fantasy to latch onto and identity with. Kids are drawn in by the action and adventure. The show provides them with a violent fantasy which allows for the expression of anger against authority figures. However, the show seldom shows people being killed. Most often, the bullets miss their targets and villains walk away from the most terrifying crashes into the arms of a waiting police force. Thus, parents cannot object too strongly to their kids' desires to see wicked authority figures violently erased from the scene. Moreover, B.A. provides children with a very appealing, cartoon-like (in fact, Mr. T has his own Saturday morning cartoon series) strongman. He defies authority, loves children and expresses his feelings physically.

Now that the kids are seated in front of the set, the producers must turn out a series that will also draw in Mom and Dad, the people who pay the bills. Essentially, Dad gets a "buddy" show with lots of action featuring the smooth running of a military unit. When Mom ventures in for a look, she can enjoy Face's comic attempts to seduce the female victim of the week, or, if she happens across an earlier episode of the show, she can enjoy Amy's adventures as a functioning, if marginal, member of the team.

Within this fantasy world, neatly designed to draw in the nuclear family, contradictions rear their perplexing heads. The audience is at odds with itself—riddled by class, gender, racial, generational antagonisms—and the fantasy narrative must allow for, but also subsume these differences, somehow reconcile these tensions, in order to function as a coherent whole. Even more fundamentally, the producers are at odds with their audience. Fantasies which toy with the destruction of the economic system from which the producers benefit ironically draw in the audience and make money for those businessmen. To attract viewers, a basic discontent is assumed, and, moreover, this discontent is allowed a violent, physical expression.

After attracting this audience by acknowledging inequalities that most Americans can relate to in one form or another, however, television producers need to get down to brass tacks. They must put the audience in the mood to buy things. If the audience wants to write politicians, march in the streets, yell at the boss, blow up a factory, or run away from home, the producers have not done their job.

Thus, contradictions within society must be masked, displaced, mediated or reconciled so that consumerism can continue. Contradictions are not found within television narratives because they reflect contradictions in the society at large (although they do in an indirect way), but, rather, because these fantasies are functional. They attract viewers for producers who use their numbers to attract advertising dollars. Social discontent may be evoked, but it is also managed with a clear profit motive in mind.

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Notes

[1]Portions of this paper were presented at the 38th Annual University Film and Video Association Conference, Harrisonburg, Virginia, July 31, 1984.

[2]The last episode aired in the 1985-86 season seems to indicate that a female Amer-Vietnamese illegal alien character will appear on a regular basis in the 1986-87 season.

[3]See Dyer for a discussion of the importance of stars to members of minority/marginal communities.

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